UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General, in Montreal, says United Nations has contingency plans for withdrawal of UNPROFOR; stresses need to avoid pessimism, citing continuing efforts to achieve negotiated settlement in former Yugoslavia.

+ Contact Group says its territorial proposal for Bosnia and Herzegovina remains basis for settlement, but could be adjusted by agreement of parties; supports continuation of UNPROFOR, if risks do not become unacceptable, and strict enforcement of Security Council resolutions.

+ UNPROFOR reports generally stable situation in former Yugoslavia, despite continued fighting in Bihac pocket; Bosnian Serbs release sick Jordanian detainee in exchange for Russian volunteer.

+ General Assembly calls on all States to become party to Law of Sea Convention and implementation Agreement on deep seabed mining provisions; resolution adopted by 130 votes in favour to 1 against, with 7 abstentions.

+ Withdrawal of Russian forces from Baltic States was historic event which reinforced security in Europe, Latvian Prime Minister tells General Assembly.

+ No-action motion on draft resolution on capital punishment defeated in Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee by 65 votes in favour to 74 against, with 20 abstentions.

+ Secretary-General appoints Alvaro de Soto Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, effective 1 January; Rosario Green to serve in Secretary-General's Cabinet as Special Adviser.

+ Multinational Force reports significant progress in establishment of secure and stable environment in Haiti; notes deployment of Interim Security Force and international police monitors in outlying areas.

+ Member States owe United Nations $2 billion as of 30 November; $500 million owed to regular budget and $1.5 billion to peace-keeping.

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For information media—not an official record

+ Pledges totalling $135 million announced for UNRWA's 1995 programmes for Palestinian people.

+ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights holds discussion on education and public information activities; High Commissioner for Human Rights says United Nations must teach common language of humanity to people everywhere.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was in Montreal today, where he addressed the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. He was expected to return to New York later in the day.

In remarks to correspondents, the Secretary-General confirmed that there were contingency plans for the withdrawal of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). He stressed that the Organization was working hard for a negotiated settlement in the former Yugoslavia, but warned that the Security Council might decide to withdraw the Force if no progress were made. However, he also stressed that it was important to avoid pessimism.

The Secretary-General defended UNPROFOR's record, pointing out that it had negotiated a cease-fire between the Serbs and Croats and provided humanitarian assistance to refugees, and that the hostilities had been confined geographically. He went on express thanks for Canada's important contributions to United Nations peace-keeping operations.

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The Contact Group has reaffirmed that its territorial proposal for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its commitment to the Republic's integrity and sovereignty, remain the basis for a settlement there. However, in a text issued on 2 December, the Foreign Ministers of the Group said the territorial proposal could be adjusted by mutual agreement between the parties. They added that constitutional arrangements agreeable to the parties would have to be drawn up that preserved Bosnia and Herzegovina's integrity and allowed equitable and balanced arrangements for the Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb entities. The text was transmitted by the members of the Group -- France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States -- in a letter to the President of the Security Council dated 5 December.

The Contact Group expressed deep concern about the recent intensification of hostilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly around Bihac. It stressed the need for an immediate cease-fire in the safe area, adding that a solution to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia could only be achieved at the negotiating table, not on the battlefield.

The Group stated that the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was performing a mission of great importance, and that it should continue, provided that the risks did not become unacceptable. It supported UNPROFOR's

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efforts to pursue demilitarization, particularly of the Bihac safe area and Sarajevo. It demanded immediate freedom of movement for the Force and for humanitarian supplies throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Group also reconfirmed its full support for strict enforcement of relevant Security Council resolutions and decisions taken in pursuance of them.

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The situation in the former Yugoslavia was generally stable today, despite continued fighting in the Bihac pocket, according to a United Nations spokesman. However, British peace-keepers on foot patrol outside Gorazde were attacked and pinned down for two hours yesterday. They returned fire, and escaped without sustaining any casualties. Meanwhile, a United Nations observation post outside Tuzla came under fire, and the command bunker and a vehicle were destroyed. The Nordic peace-keepers manning the post had been warned of the attack in advance, and managed to evacuate it without injury.

The spokesman went on to say that a Jordanian military observer suffering from a serious heart condition had been released by Bosnian Serb forces in Banja Luka in exchange for a Russian observer who volunteered to take his place. The Bosnian Serbs had insisted that a hostage be provided to replace the Jordanian soldier. They also released one of the two observers seized in violation of an exchange agreement yesterday, but continued to hold a total of four United Nations personnel.

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The General Assembly has called on all States to become party to the Law of the Sea Convention and the implementation Agreement on Part XI -- on deep seabed mining -- to achieve universal participation in the Convention. The Assembly reaffirmed the unified character of the Convention, which entered into force on 16 November, and called on all States to harmonize their national legislation with, and ensure consistent application of, its provisions. It took that action yesterday, in a resolution adopted by 130 votes in favour to 1 against (Turkey), with 7 abstentions (Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Peru, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Thailand and Venezuela).

According to the resolution, the Assembly will undertake an annual review and evaluation of the implementation of the Convention and other developments relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea. It requested the Secretary-General to provide, from within existing resources, services for meetings of States parties to the Convention and to convene a meeting relating to the organization of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in New York from 15 to 19 May 1995. He was also requested to designate a United Nations staff member with secretariat support to prepare for the organization of the Tribunal.

The Assembly asked the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive annual report and special reports on specific topics; make recommendations for action by the Assembly; strengthen the existing system for providing information on the law of the sea; ensure that the Organization could respond

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to requests by States, particularly developing ones, for advice and assistance; and establish facilities for deposit of maritime maps and charts.

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The Prime Minister of Latvia, Marius Gailis, told the General Assembly today that the withdrawal of Russian military forces from the Baltic States was an historic event which brought one of the consequences of the Second World War to an end. Speaking on behalf of the Baltic States, he said that for the Russian Federation, the withdrawal was a milestone on the path of democratization and a repudiation of an odious part of the former Soviet Union's legacy. For Europe, it meant increased security and new opportunities for integration. He added that certain agreements would require continued cooperation by all sides, and the involvement of the international community, until the end of the century.

As the Assembly concluded its consideration of the withdrawal of foreign military forces from the Baltic States, the Russian representative said a page had been turned on the past. The Russian Federation and the Baltic States could now turn to important trade and economic issues.

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A motion that no action be taken on a draft resolution concerning capital punishment was defeated today in the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) by 65 votes in favour to 74 against, with 20 abstentions. The Committee decided to postpone action on the draft until tomorrow. Singapore proposed the no-action motion, supported by Algeria, Bangladesh and Egypt.

By the terms of the draft resolution on capital punishment, the General Assembly would encourage all States that have not yet abolished the death penalty to consider instituting a moratorium on pending executions. The Assembly would take that action with a view to ensuring that the principle that no State should dispose of the life of any human being be universally affirmed by the year 2000. It would also call on all States to consider acceding to or ratifying the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today announced some senior-level staff changes which will take effect on 1 January. Special Adviser Alvaro de Soto will move to the Department for Political Affairs, where he will replace Rosario Green as Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Ms. Green will be transferred to the Secretary-General's Cabinet to serve as Special Adviser.

John Hughes, former Editor of The Christian Science Monitor, will join the Secretariat in January as Director of Communications in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. He will help articulate the

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Organization's policies and coordinate press and public affairs programmes. He will take leave of absence from Brigham Young University in Utah, where he is Professor of Communications and Director of the International Media Studies Programme.

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There has been significant progress in the establishment of a secure and stable environment in Haiti, according to the latest report of the Multinational Force. The report, covering the two-week period from 21 November to 3 December, was transmitted by the United States to the President of the Security Council in a letter dated 5 December. It noted that there had been no incidents of violence directed against the Force or the advance team of the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH), and few incidents among Haitians.

Operations by the Multinational Force and deployments of the Interim Public Security Force and international police monitors to outlying areas have significantly enhanced overall stability in Haiti, the report said. Meanwhile, the Force has helped Haitian ministries to establish functional governance. It has also assisted with relief work, including the restoration of infrastructure and services, in the wake of tropical storm Gordon.

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As of 30 November, Member States owed the United Nations some $2 billion, according to the latest update on the Organization's financial situation. Of that amount, more than $500 million was for assessments for the regular budget and $1.5 billion was for peace-keeping operations.

The United States -- the largest debtor -- owed a total of $666 million to the regular and peace-keeping budgets. The Russian Federation owed the United Nations $532 million. The figures released today did not reflect a payment of $41 million made by Italy on 1 December.

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Pledges totalling $135 million were announced yesterday for the 1995 programmes of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Agency provides a broad range of relief and social services to the Palestinian people.

At a meeting of the General Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee for Voluntary Contributions to UNWRA, announcements of contributions and support were made by 32 countries, as well as the European Commission and the Holy See. The largest pledges were made by the United States ($55 million), the European Commission ($40 million), Denmark ($10.7 million) and Switzerland ($7.5 million).

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The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has held a day of general discussion on education and public information activities relating to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Participating in the discussion in Geneva on Monday were representatives of several United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala Lasso, said the Organization had been giving increasing attention to human rights education. The objective must be to teach the "common language of humanity" to people everywhere, so that they could translate it into their daily conduct. Human rights should not be one subject among others, it should permeate all aspects of education at all levels and in all forms.

Genevieve Pinet of WHO welcomed the Decade for Human Rights Education and said her agency placed much hope in the human rights commitment of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. She appealed for the introduction of thematic human rights education on the right to health during the Decade. The realization of that right was a prerequisite for the enjoyment of other essential rights, such as the right to development, she stressed.

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